



The H. Mann will. Prook. Collection

Chapter III

CONTRAST AT BETHLEHEM.

The birth and infancy of Jesus — notwithstanding that Christmas time comes round again and again — receive less attention than they deserve; owing, no doubt, to the interest attached to the events of His manhood and death. Nevertheless, they suggest some useful lessons, especially to those of us who have much to do with the weak and trembling, and are ourselves, alas! often weak and trembling, too. May I offer one or two thoughts on the subject, which, though quite simple, have proved of blessing to my own heart?

I.

*Great weakness may be quite consistent
with true greatness and goodness.*

It is unnecessary to dwell even for a moment on the weakness of the Infant Jesus. The Scripture has left no possible doubt about it.

Unable to speak, to walk, indeed to do anything for Himself — weak with all the weakness of the human race; yea, more truly helpless than a young bird or a tiny worm, the Holy Child was laid in the manger hard by the beasts that perish.

And yet we know that there was the Divine Son, the Express Image of the Father, the Everlasting King, the Enthroned One, the Creator, "without whom was not anything made that was made"! It is indeed a contrast, which first astounds us, and then compels our adoration and love. Our God is a consuming Fire — our God is a little Child. Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory — and yet He is there in fashion as a Babe, for whom, in all His sweet innocence, they cannot find a room in the crowded inn.

Yes, my friend, to be weak, to be small, to be sadly unfit for the strifes of time; to feel weary and unequal to the hard battles of life; to realise that you are pushed out and away by the crowd, to



The A. Mann will.brook Collection

be contemptuously forgotten by the multitude shouting and singing across the road — all this may be your case; and yet you may be God's chosen vessel, intended — framed to suffer and triumph with Him." You, even you, may be destined by His wisdom to fill for Him some great place in action against the hosts of iniquity and unbelief. Above all, you may be appointed by God the Father to be like His Son, with a holy likeness of will, of affection, of character.

For, indeed, weakness in many things is not inconsistent with goodness, and purity, and love. The manger has in this also a message for us. Out of that mystery of helplessness came forth the Lion-Heart of Love, which led Him, for us, to the winepress alone, and which, while we were yet rebels, loved us with an everlasting love, going, for us, to a lonely and shameful death. Take heart, then, remembering that it is out of weakness we are to be made strong. Be of good courage — to-day may be the day of the enemy's strength, when you are constrained to cry out: "This is your hour and the power of darkness!" but to-morrow will be yours. The weakness and humiliation of the stable must go before the Mount of Transfiguration, the Mount of Calvary, the Resurrection Glory, and the exaltation of the Father's Throne. Take heart!

II.

*A condition of complete dependence may be quite consistent with a great vocation
— the call, that is, to a great work.*

I suppose that there is nothing known to man so absolutely dependent upon the help of others as a little child! Life itself begins in total dependence upon another life, and is only preserved in still greater dependence on powers outside itself — for air, for light, for heat, for food, for clothes, for comfort — indeed, for every needed thing. This is especially the case with the child. The young lions and sheep, the tiny flies and the small fishes — these are all able to do something for their own support; but the new-born babe presents a picture of complete dependence. And this Babe was no exception. What a service of imperishable worth to all the world was rendered by His mother in her loving care of Him!

And yet we know something of the stupendous task to which He came! That little Child was to become the greatest Example, the greatest Teacher, the greatest, the only Saviour, the greatest



The H. Mann Willbrook Collection

Healer of the sorrows of men, the greatest Benefactor, the greatest Ruler and King. Upon Him and upon His word, who lies there in His Virgin mother's arms, dependent on her breast for life and warmth, unnumbered multitudes were to rest their all for this life and the next-tens of thousands, in the face of inexpressible agonies, were to trust to Him their every hope, and for His sake were to die a thousand deaths.

Let not, then, your heart be troubled because you also are so dependent on others -So hedged in by your circumstances, so limited by sickness and pain, so incompetent through inexperience and ignorance, or that you are so compelled to stand and wait when you would fain rush on and do or dare for your Lord. All this may be even so, and yet you may be called to share in the same high vocation as your Saviour.

I read lately of an old saint chained for weary years to a dungeon-wall, unable even to feed himself, whose testimony for Jesus was powerful to the deliverance of many of his persecutors. He was killed at last, lest, one by one, he should convert the jailers also who were employed to supply him with food.

Are you "bound" in some way? Are you chained fast to some strange trial? Are you appointed to serve in what seems like a den of beasts? Are you under the compulsion of some injustice? Are you made to feel helpless and useless without the support of those around you? Ah, well, do not repine. Do not forget that God's call comes often — Oh, so often — to just such as you — to witness for Him in spite of "these bonds," to declare the truth, to dare to reprove sin. Above all, do not doubt your God. You may be very dependent to-day, but you may be more than victorious to-morrow.

III.

Poverty and friendlessness are often found in company with a great heart.

There was no home for Jesus in Bethlehem. There was room for Him in the inn. There was no cradle in the stable. There was no protector when Herod arose to kill. What a strange world it is! Did ever babe open eyes on such a topsy-turvy condition of affairs? The King of Glory had not



The H. Mann will. Prook. Collection

where to lay His head! Mary, it is true, was strong in faith, but both she and Joseph must needs soon fly into Egypt with the Babe. Refused at the inn, soon even the stable must cast them out!

He came to take all men into His heart, and they, ere ever they saw Him, cast Him forth as an outlaw!

And we who know what it means to be loved of Him, what can we say? Our hearts are bowed with something of shame and grief that He thus suffered, and yet we have a secret joy because He suffered so well! For of all the greatnesses of the Babe this is the greatest — the greatness of His heart. "The Sacred Heart of Jesus," the Romanists call it. "The All-Conquering Heart of Jesus," I prefer to name it. For it was His wealth of love that really gave Him the victory.

Does one read these lines who is poor, who is cast out by those who are dear, who is a stranger in a strange land, who is driven from "pillar to post," who is harassed by open foes and wounded by secret enmity? Well, to that one let me say, remember your Lord's poverty and friendlessness; remember the tossings up and down of His infancy; the frugal cottage home in Nazareth wherein His family was finally gathered — despite its bareness and toil — was a place of peace and abundance, compared with the stable, the flight into Egypt, and the sojourn among aliens there.

Are you, dear friend, tempted to complain of your narrow surroundings, of your small opportunity to shine before others, or of a want of appreciation of your service and gifts and powers by those who should know you? Oh, remember the Babe, and the long years of His condescension to men of low estate, to the cramped surroundings of the carpenter's shed, and the sleepy Jewish village. Are you tried sometimes because you have to suffer the hatred or jealousy, secret or open, of those for whom you feel nothing but goodwill, and who perhaps once thought themselves happy in your friendship? Well, in such hours, remember your Master, and the hatred of Herod seeking to kill the Child. Try to call to mind something of the secret, as well as the open, bitterness of men, religious and irreligious alike, which began to hunt Him while yet in swaddling clothes, and which hunted Him still all through His days.



The
H. Mann will Brooks
Collection

But amidst it all, what a great heart of passionate love was His! Blessed be His Name for ever! Whether the poverty and suffering and hatred were or were not favourable to it, there it was — the Great Heart of all the world. What about you? Can you ever be again the same since you learned that He loved you? Can you ever be again content to remain little and narrow, with interests and affections that are little and narrow also? Will you not rise, as He rose, above the small ambitions of the spiritual pigmies who meet you at every turn, determined to look beyond your own tiny circle, and the low aims of those around you? Depend upon it, you ought to do so. Depend upon it, the Holy Saviour can enable you to do so. Depend upon it, the world's great need is "Great Hearts." Will you be one?